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Westmoreland Describes Television Interview as 'Inquisition'

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NEW YORK, Nov. 19—Retired general William C. Westmoreland today called a two-hour CBS interview with Mike Wallace an "inquisition" and said that at one point he almost walked out because he believed that he was "participating in my own lynching."

Despite his "first instincts" to cut short the interview with Wallace and CBS producer George Crile, Westmoreland said, he decided to continue because he had "seen so many times on '60 Minutes' that such a walkout looked like an admission of guilt."

During his third day on the stand in his \$120 million libel action against CBS Inc., the general, 70, said he was unprepared and was "rattlesnaked" in the 1981 interview for the CBS Reports documentary at issue in the case. The program was shown in 1982.

Westmoreland said he had agreed to the interview after Wallace, whom he knew in Vietnam, telephoned him to say that CBS was doing a "special program" on Vietnam and wanted Westmoreland to be on camera "to give it authenticity."

Westmoreland recalled saying, "Is this going to be a '60 Minutes'-type program?" He said Wallace replied, "Oh, no. This is going to

be an educational and objective program." Westmoreland sued CBS after the documentary, called "The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception," accused him of being part of a "conspiracy" by military officials in Vietnam in 1967 to hold down enemy troop estimates to maintain support for the war.

When Westmoreland's lawyer, Dan M. Burt, asked the general whether he got angry at any point in the 1981 interview, the general said, "Indeed, indeed. I realized that I was not participating in a rational interview; that this was an inquisition."

"I also realized that I was participating in my own lynching. The problem was I didn't know what I was being lynched about."

"I realized he [Wallace] and Mr. Crile had orchestrated a scenario so that they would go for the kill. They wanted to go for my jugular. It became very evident. I realized that I was ambushed."

CBS lawyer David Boies objected to Westmoreland's characterization of the motives of the two CBS codefendants, and U.S. District Court Judge Pierre Leval directed the jury to disregard it.

During a conversation with the judge out of the jury's hearing, Boies complained about "some of the speeches that [Westmoreland] is

making, where he not only characterized things in a way that I am sure Mr. Burt knows is not proper testimony from a witness, but does so in a way that has obviously been rehearsed."

"I think I have been fairly patient, when we have gone through speeches last week, including him taking out of his pocket a card to demonstrate things that had not previously been identified to us, although it was perfectly clear that Mr. Burt was aware of what was coming," Boies told the judge.

Burt, answering Boies, said in the conversation at the other side of the courtroom from the jury, "I won't deign to answer this business about rehearsing. What the witness has said is what he feels."

"More importantly, sir," Burt argued to the judge, "on that interview they 'close-framed' him—they put the shots in very tight. They got him licking his lips, and that may very well be argued . . . that is evidence of guilt [that] he was trapped, and I think he is entitled to explain what happened."

Leval told the lawyers that the best evidence of what happened during Westmoreland's interview were the extensive tapes of the uncut versions of it, large portions of which have been shown to the jury.

Although the judge ruled out Westmoreland's characterizations such as a "lynching" or an "inquisition," he allowed some explanations of how unprepared he believed he was to remain on the record.

The general said that after agreeing to the interview, he went to the Army office of the chief of military history in Washington to do research on the period before the Tet offensive in January 1968.

He said Crile promised to send him a letter outlining the interview, but it arrived the night before the session. The letter from Crile, delivered to the Plaza hotel, where CBS had booked the general in New York City, read: "Using the Tet offensive as a jumping-off point, we plan to explore the role of American intelligence in the Vietnam war—how well did we identify and report the intentions and capabilities of the enemy we were facing?"

The program concluded that the American people and the president were surprised and disillusioned by the communist attacks in South Vietnam during Tet because they had been told by Westmoreland and others that the enemy was running out of men.

Special correspondent John Kennedy contributed to this report.